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LIMITED WAR AND AMERICAN GROUND FORCES:  
TOWARD NEW DOCTRINE\*

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The post-war contraction of American military power is such a familiar historical phenomenon that its current manifestation should occasion little surprise. In the wake of US disengagement from the war in Vietnam, the scale and overseas deployment of American military forces have been sharply reduced. Ground combat forces have declined well below the pre-Vietnam "baseline" level; Congressional pressures have intensified to withdraw US troops from Europe despite Administration pleas to await the outcome of current force reduction negotiations; and there are indications that the already depleted Far East commitment will be further reduced.

So far, these trends have encountered surprisingly little opposition, even from those sectors which might have been expected to oppose them most vigorously. The Administration, for example, has opposed pressures for overseas troop reductions less in terms of their logic than in terms of their timing. Civilian strategic analysts have also been relatively mute, in sharp contrast to the intense debate which followed the post-Korean reductions. Even the military has been curiously self-effacing; preoccupied with post-Vietnam internal problems (and sensitive to widespread public disenchantment), senior military leaders appear to have forsworn debate on fundamental strategic issues in favor of ad hoc programmatic reforms, while proposals relegating conventional forces to functions ranging from the maintenance of trained cadres to domestic

civil action proliferate virtually unchallenged.

This remarkable absence of dissensus on a matter so closely touching international security would be reassuring but for two problems. The first is simply that the pressures to reduce American conventional military forces have to date far outnumbered reasoned analyses of the requirements those forces must continue to satisfy. As a result, something of a paradox is occurring: at the very moment when ratification of strategic nuclear parity increasingly shifts the burden of deterrence and defense to conventional forces, the latter are becoming increasingly less capable of bearing it.<sup>2</sup>

The second cause for discomfort is that the continuing decline of conventional ground forces has thus far been unaccompanied by a corresponding reevaluation of the strategy governing their employment. With counter-insurgency bankrupted by the revulsion over Vietnam, and no effective replacement available to lend a minimal consistency to force posture decisions and tactical doctrine, the military -- especially the Army -- march forward in a welter of confusion about the future security role they are to play.

The fact is that we are bereft of an adequate limited war doctrine, one appropriate to post-Vietnam threat and capability conditions and able to provide reasonable guidance for the development, commitment, and employment of American conventional power. We face what might be called a doctrinal anomaly, in which profound changes in the security environment have yet to be accommodated by a corresponding change in strategy.

It might be argued that the Nixon Doctrine adequately defines such strategic shift. It does not. Even in the Asian context to which it was originally applied, the Nixon Doctrine has been shown to be the

range of future US commitments. In the context of Europe it is even less definitive. Unlike Containment, it postulates no threat, offers no explanation for the behavior of the threatener, and therefore provides no forecast either of the contingencies in which US forces might be committed or of the objectives they might be expected to achieve.<sup>3</sup> As a result, despite the Doctrine and its associated "Strategy of Realistic Deterrence", the United States in 1973 continues to base its limited war planning on doctrine developed over a decade ago.<sup>4</sup>

There is a certain deja vu quality to all this, for a similar situation occurred in the latter 1950's, when the Eisenhower Administration found itself caught between rising strategic costs and a budgetary crunch. Then as now, the Administration conceded strategic superiority in favor of "sufficiency"; and then as now, the problem lay in devising a limited war posture consistent with strategic stalemate and budgetary constraints. For Eisenhower the solution lay in the deployment of "tactical" nuclear weapons, of which the US enjoyed an ephemeral monopoly.<sup>5</sup> But no such technological "fix" will resolve our present problem. The arguments now reemerging for greater reliance on battlefield nuclear weapons are no more persuasive today than twenty years ago -- indeed, given the strategic balance, they are far less credible. Neither can we hope in the face of rising manpower costs to replace our former nuclear superiority with one based on conventional capabilities.

Given this situation, only one thing is predictable: unless we are willing once again to undertake a serious reassessment of the premises of

our conventional force posture decisions, the next few years are likely to witness a return to that unhappy condition in which strategic doctrine accords neither with the capabilities we are willing to maintain, nor with the threats for which we presumably maintain them. At best, such a situation would be uncomfortable; at worst, it might be extremely dangerous.

## II

The first requirement for developing new doctrine is a reasonable estimate of the threat it must oppose. What can we say about that threat in the light of recent environmental changes?

It is easier to suggest what it is not. First, it is not one of deliberate Soviet or Chinese military action against areas known to be of vital interest to the United States -- Western Europe or Japan, for example. This conclusion is central to any discussion of revised limited war strategy, for existing doctrine and the force postures associated with it were originally developed -- and continue to be justified -- largely in terms of such a contingency.<sup>6</sup> But continuing European detente and recent diplomatic events in the Far East make such an estimate increasingly unpersuasive. How sensitive this improvement in atmosphere is to the military balance is unclear. Certainly continued deterrence of calculated Soviet or Chinese aggression must remain a fundamental U.S. objective. But we should recognize that we are deterring what is in any case a highly improbable event.

Nor is the current threat primarily one of Soviet- or Chinese-instigated insurgency. That does not imply that insurgencies will not occur; on the contrary, they are very likely to occur more frequently than heretofore, particularly in Africa and Latin America. But that they will be deliberately encouraged by the U. S. S. R. or China is far less clear. While both Moscow and Peking may continue to give moral and perhaps material support to "wars of national liberation," the events of the last two years in Southeast Asia strongly suggest the intention of both nations to limit such commitments, especially where it appears that failure to do so might seriously jeopardize detente.<sup>7</sup> Were the situation otherwise, the Nixon Doctrine would be far less tenable. As it is, the Doctrine allows us -- indeed, requires us -- to discount local insurgency as a threat requiring the commitment of American ground forces.

In sum, if there is a dominant quality to the military threat in the 1970's, it is the diminished credibility of those contingencies which formerly provided much of the rationale for US strategy. The growing self-confidence of the two principal communist powers, the moderation of American fears of communism-on-the-march, and the recognition by all three nations of their vulnerability to manipulation by their respective clients combine to induce a new awareness of mutual benefit in avoiding confrontation where vital interests are not directly threatened. And of course, this awareness is considerably enhanced by the condition of unlimited mutual risk ratified by SALT I.

If the contingencies thus discounted were the sole threats to international stability and US security, the fragmentary quality of current conventional force posture decisions would be far less troublesome. But if the threat of deliberate great power conflict has diminished, that of inadvertent conflict has increased -- inadvertent in the sense that, whatever its origins, a local conflict might produce a superpower confrontation neither anticipated nor desired by either. Far from being reduced by the growing mutuality of great power interest, the threat of inadvertent conflict in part depends upon it, and is in some measure more dangerous because of it. Since the threatened conflict is not anticipated, it is not easily avoided; and since it arises from no intended clash of vital interests, it offers little scope for the reasoned calculations of cost and risk which might otherwise moderate the danger of overcommitment by one or both antagonists.<sup>8</sup>

Such an inadvertent clash might occur in several ways. It might, for example, erupt in an area where interests vital to both powers are geographically adjacent, but whose stability neither entirely controls. The obvious case is Central Europe, where Soviet sensitivities are acute, and where increasing East-West detente may paradoxically produce greater regional instability.<sup>9</sup> Soviet reaction to any hint of East-European reorientation is sufficiently familiar to require no evidence here. The 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia may have delayed such reorientation, but it will not be delayed indefinitely, and the growing pressure of nationalist, ethnic, and regional aspirations will sooner or later again challenge Soviet hegemony.

Barring a marked shift in Soviet security perceptions, such a challenge will pose a volatile political problem, to which the U. S. S. R. may once again feel impelled to respond militarily. It requires no great leap of the imagination to visualize such a conflict spilling across tense borders, whether by accident or design. A misinterpretation of instructions by a NATO commander, the violation of a neutral or Western border by an over-zealous Soviet unit, the accidental destruction of a border town by misplaced air or artillery fire, the retreat of resistance groups across an armed frontier -- any such occurrence might be sufficient to initiate a chain reaction of increasingly dangerous events, committing both sides to a widening engagement neither originally intended.

Alternatively, an inadvertent clash might occur in an area where the interests of one of the superpowers are ambiguous, tempting the other into a mistaken assessment of opportunity. The potential for this sort of conflict is increased by the propensity of states -- including the U. S. -- to avoid specifying their "vital" interests until they are threatened. The Korean conflict was instructive in this regard; both the U. S. and the subsequent Chinese interventions produced conflicts which were inadvertent in the sense used here. Contemporary candidates might be the Middle East and South Asia, though the likelihood of superpower conflict in those areas is reduced by the very recognition of its danger. A case which would once have appeared implausible but which now seems increasingly possible is the Sino-Soviet problem. Here, as in Central Europe, confronting interests and local



instability coincide. Whether outright conflict is likely to erupt is difficult to forecast; but the potential for it is increased both by the growing Chinese nuclear capability, and by the possibility that ~~centrifugal~~ political forces in China might reemerge after the departure of the present leadership. Whether as a result of Soviet reaction to a perceived Chinese threat, or of Chinese reaction to perceived Soviet interference in China's internal difficulties, a major clash could easily occur.<sup>10</sup>

Here indeed is a case where U. S. interests are ambiguous. But there can be little doubt that they would be affected by such a conflict. Whether the United States would physically intervene in such a situation may be argued; but either by intervention or by spillover, a superpower confrontation could conceivably occur.

Finally, an inadvertent conflict might occur simply as a consequence of momentary political irrationality or bureaucratic error. The Cuban crisis of 1962 may be the classic case; but one can visualize equally plausible scenarios involving Berlin, Latin America, or South Asia.<sup>11</sup>

Some will object that such contingencies are not very likely. But doctrine must assume some threat condition, and at least two factors make inadvertent conflict a persuasive candidate. The first is the indeterminacy of the current international environment. As Kissinger has aptly pointed out,<sup>12</sup> it is a system without an agreed concept of international order. In such an environment, one can expect a fluidity of national objectives and commitments calculated to produce uncertainty and risk. The Nixon Administration's

recent diplomatic initiatives appear radical only in contrast with the stasis of the last two decades. The transformations they presage may be still more severe. In an environment so dynamic, it would be surprising if inadvertent conflict failed to occur.

The second factor tending to increase the likelihood of inadvertent conflict is the present evolution of Soviet strategic doctrine. Many observers have noted a curious symbiosis between US and Soviet strategy, in which the evolution of the latter lags our own by five to ten years. Only recently, for example, has the USSR come to accept the premises of the assured destruction posture adopted by the US in the mid-1960's (and only after persistent US advocacy).<sup>13</sup>

In terms of conventional strategy, at any rate, the USSR now appears to be moving through an evolution very like the one which produced the US doctrine of flexible response. Once firmly wedded to the notion that a war between nuclear powers would inevitably be nuclear, Soviet doctrine now increasingly entertains the possibility of local conventional war. At the same time, as Soviet interests have become more extended, the requirement to defend those interests short of total risk has become as apparent to Soviet decision-makers as to American strategists. The growing Soviet naval strength, the extension of Russian military power into the Middle East and South Asia, and the post-Czechoslovakia improvement in Soviet conventional ground capabilities all reflect an enhanced appreciation of the need for limited

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war capabilities. One need not fall back on Cold War rhetoric to suggest that they also increase the danger of unintended US-Soviet confrontation.

What does seem clear, then, is that inadvertent conflict is at all events more likely than most conceivable alternatives (including those currently driving US force posture decisions); that its probability of occurrence will very likely increase in the future, detente notwithstanding; and that, whatever its likelihood, its consequences could easily be catastrophic. Having no defined objectives by which to guide their actions, both contenders in such a situation would soon find their objectives defined for them by actions already undertaken. The effect would be to produce an escalating conflict whose original causes were irrelevant, and whose ultimate consequences would be in the interests of neither.

### III

In an environment of nuclear parity, conventional forces must seek both to deter limited threats and to defeat them should deterrence fail.

But inadvertent war is not easily deterred; on the contrary, it presumes a breakdown of the very rational calculus deterrence is designed to influence.

Nor would war-fighting (in the traditional sense of decisive ground action) be a suitable response -- in part because in areas like Europe much of the fighting would take place on the soil to be defended; but more especially because it is difficult to imagine what would constitute a decision in a war neither side wanted in the first place. The problem of establishing limits

would be compounded by the fact that conflict erupted contrary to the expectations of at least one (and possibly both) of the contenders. To treat such a situation as one would a deliberate provocation would risk initiating to no purpose the very escalation process we should wish to prevent.

Instead, a more useful function for conventional forces would be the control and insulation of such unstable conflict conditions, with a view to the earliest possible reestablishment of local order. In this case, unlike war-fighting, the function of military action would not be to resolve conflict, but to end it; and the mission of committed forces would not be to achieve local advantage, but to impose local stalemate. Such a doctrine would be grounded in the belief that the best hope for resolution of a superpower confrontation lies in the willingness of both parties to treat the engagement as an unfortunate but remediable error, whose rapid correction at minimal additional cost is an overriding mutual objective. The military task, then, would be to encourage an immediate shift to negotiation.<sup>15</sup>

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Such a conflict control doctrine would closely resemble the "pause" strategy which briefly guided NATO planning in the late 1950's. Like "pause", conflict control visualizes an intermediate stage between deterrence failure and full-scale commitment, a stage during which local military success is explicitly subordinated to the possibility of a return to diplomacy. But where "pause" was intended to contain a massive Soviet attack, requiring for that purpose either an unattainable forward conventional deployment or the early use of tactical nuclear weapons, conflict control reflects the

judgment that a US-Soviet confrontation is likely to be inadvertent, hence initially local. It therefore neither requires an unrealistic conventional capability, nor (as will be seen) recommends early nuclear use.

What if this assessment is wrong? Certainly there is always some risk of deliberate Soviet aggression, and prudence requires that the US and its allies be able to meet it. The more troublesome question is how to do so given current resource constraints. Forces designed to perform a conflict control mission would certainly not suffice to repel a massive invasion. But then, neither would presently deployed conventional forces, notwithstanding the arguments of some opponents of unilateral reduction. On the contrary, current NATO planning clearly anticipates the inability of the forward defense to contain a major attack in the absence of clear warning and substantial reinforcement -- hence the heavy reliance on tactical nuclear weapons.<sup>17</sup>

The plain fact is that we cannot have what both we and our allies would like to have -- a conventional forward defense capable of blocking a well-planned Soviet attack at the frontiers. Such a posture would require an expenditure of resources far beyond our present willingness to sustain, and substantially greater than our allies have ever been willing to sustain, even in periods when the threat of Soviet aggression was considerably more credible. Moreover, it might be unwise to acquire such a capability even if we could sustain it; for any posture adequate to defend forward against the

concentrated power of a carefully-marshalled Soviet attack would also almost certainly be so large as to pose an intolerable offensive threat to the USSR. Negotiations on mutual force reductions would collapse, and the whole painfully-achieved structure of European detente very likely crumble in the face of renewed suspicion and hostility.<sup>18</sup>

Adoption of a conflict control strategy will not resolve this dilemma. But the posture it calls for is no less adequate in that respect than our current one. Either way, in the event of major aggression, the US would be forced to choose among unpalatable alternatives -- disengagement, escalation to the nuclear level, or mobilization for sustained conventional war. But against a lesser challenge, the posture proposed here would offer significant advantages. In Europe, for example, notwithstanding the declaratory commitment to forward defense, NATO forces are deployed in a fashion which virtually prohibits it.<sup>19</sup> A surprise engagement of even small magnitude would almost certainly force NATO into the classic pattern of defense-in-depth: delay, withdrawal, reinforcement, counterattack. At best, the result would be the loss, however temporary, of a certain amount of territory. At worst, since this sort of response is indistinguishable from one having ultimately offensive intentions, it could easily provoke preemptive Soviet escalation. The configuration required by a conflict control posture, in contrast, would make forward defense against the lesser threat a practical and credible option, while indicating by its very offensive incapacity the

limited nature of its objectives.

A conflict control strategy would be substantially more responsive than current doctrine, moreover, for its implementation is not dependent upon an estimate of Soviet intentions; it requires us to treat any confrontation as a mistake, in an explicit effort to minimize the engagement of national prestige, and in that way to offer the other side a publicly and politically acceptable excuse for cooperating in the reestablishment of the status quo ante. It is thus very different in character from a traditional war-fighting posture, in which tactical considerations tend to become paramount, stakes rise, and national pride becomes linked to battlefield success. All three processes invite increased commitment, and are therefore the precise incentives to escalation which conflict control seeks to eliminate.

Most important, adoption of such a doctrine would deflect the resurgent temptation to return to all-or-nothing reliance on nuclear deterrence -- a strategy manifestly inadequate even when the US enjoyed a vast nuclear superiority, and which would be utterly impotent under conditions of strategic parity.

#### IV

By responding to a threat which is both definable and plausible, adoption of a conflict control strategy would help to reintegrate doctrine with requirement. By responding to a threat whose dynamic is understood, it would provide a coherent rationale currently absent from decisions on conventional

force structure, deployments, and tactical doctrine. Some of the more important implications of a conflict control doctrine for these decisions deserve mention.

At the outset, it should be understood that adoption of such a strategy would no more uniquely determine a particular level of conventional capability than would retention of present doctrine. The strength -- aggregate and deployed -- of active forces is both situational and variable; thus, for example, although conventional doctrine has not changed since the mid-1960's, active ground combat strength has varied from a high of 23 2/3 Army and Marine divisions to the present low of 16. Such fluctuation is both inevitable and appropriate: inevitable, because capability responds to political and economic as well as military pressures, and appropriate, because these pressures themselves reflect changes in the extent of the threat to be countered.

Doctrine, on the other hand, reflects the nature of the threat -- that is, the contingencies for which forces are maintained. It therefore determines the way those forces will be employed in the event of commitment. And for that reason it strongly influences the way they are organized, equipped, and trained, and in a general way the manner of their deployment. It is in respect to these areas that adoption of a conflict control doctrine would have significant impact.

First, such a doctrine will continue to require active ground forces capable of immediate commitment to battle. Whereas both deterrence and



general war requirements might be adequately satisfied by a superior mobilization capability, conflict control must rely on forces in being. The nature of the threat with which it must contend -- low response time, short duration, and high risk -- forbids reliance on the pre-Korea system of regular cadres augmented by reserve infusions to which some have suggested we should revert.

For the same reason, adoption of such a doctrine implies maximum deployment forward in areas where the risk of inadvertent conflict is high. Europe is one of these, and this argument therefore strongly opposes the unilateral withdrawal of combat units. Nor would the same purpose be served by emergency fly-back of US-based units; in fact, such a procedure might be counterproductive, constituting the first escalation in a situation whose successful resolution requires first of all the stabilization of the conflict environment.

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On the other hand, a conflict control posture could certainly tolerate a leaner ground force structure than the present one. Conflict control forces are not intended to fight a sustained conventional war; that is the function of a mobilization base. They are intended to freeze a local engagement involving another nuclear power, and that only for a short period. Since sustained combat is not intended, deployed forces can and should be configured for maximum initial combat effectiveness (in the jargon, a high tooth-to-tail ratio), retaining a residual capability for sustained logistical support primarily as a hedge against a subsequent decision to mobilize.

Finally, since an inadvertent conflict might easily occur in an area like Turkey where US forces are not deployed in strength, or as the result of Soviet intervention in an area like the Middle East where neither power is presently deployed, conflict control will require the retention of a moderate quick-reaction capability. These forces, like those deployed abroad, would be configured for the control mission; they would not be intended for reinforcement (although they could of course be used in that role), and would not require dual-basing or prepositioned stocks. Self-contained, and supported by organic airlift, they would add a necessary element of flexibility to the proposed posture. At the same time, simply by existing, they would possess a certain deterrent value.<sup>21</sup>

Adoption of a conflict control posture would imply a number of changes in hardware procurement. Additional procurement and deployment of heavy armor, for example, should be curtailed. Armor's unique value lies in its ability to attack, exploit, and pursue -- missions which would largely be proscribed in an inadvertent conflict. The very deployment of armor is a strong indicator that offensive action is contemplated. That is precisely the impression we should try to avoid while there remains a possibility of local stabilization. Moreover, armor is an inordinately greedy consumer of expendables -- fuel, lubricants, and spare parts -- and therefore promotes the unfavorable combat-to-combat-support ratio which would need to be reversed if a conflict control posture were adopted.

Instead, a conflict control strategy would urge accelerated development and procurement of weapons appropriate to forward position defense: mines, barrier-producing conventional munitions, anti-tank weapons, high-penetration artillery projectiles, and local air defense capabilities.<sup>22</sup>

Successful conflict control will also be particularly dependent on the availability of redundant, highly reliable command-and-control systems. At a minimum, such a posture would argue for the development and deployment down to the battalion level of a family of very-long-range communications systems.<sup>23</sup>

Adoption of a conflict control doctrine would help to resolve a number of the internal organizational questions which currently plague military decision-makers. Conflict control will place a considerable premium on organizational stability. A condition of inadvertent superpower conflict will be inherently unstable, and the potential for serious misunderstanding will be enormous. The situation will be far more sensitive to error in the execution of tactical assignments than would be true in a conventional war. Engaged units will be under intense pressure, not merely from the usual stress of battle, but from the close supervision of anxious political leaders. Well-established patterns of communication, coordination, and control within and among committed tactical units will accordingly be critical, and these are assured only when close familiarity exists among committed unit commanders and between the latter and their subordinates.

These considerations underscore the requirement to maintain deployed and reaction forces at full strength. They also recommend strongly the abandonment of current "tailoring" concepts in favor of the reconstitution of stable, relatively self-sufficient, and multi-capable brigade or regimental combat teams.<sup>24</sup> A good argument could also be made for reversion to the regimental system abandoned by the US after World War II (but still retained by the British army, among others).<sup>25</sup> In addition to organizational and administrative advantages, such a change might have beneficial spinoff for unit cohesion and morale -- both badly damaged by the personnel turbulence of the Vietnam period.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, adoption of a conflict control doctrine would enhance the importance of several programs of administrative reform already initiated by the military services: reductions in command overhead, lengthening of assignments, and certification for unit command only of those best qualified.

Few of these recommendations are radical; some, indeed, are already under consideration by military planners. Much more radical would be the changes in tactical doctrine required for successful conflict control, especially in contrast with traditional tactical principles. One change difficult for the military officer to accept will be the explicit requirement to remain on the tactical defensive. The temptation to exploit a local weakness must be avoided. In conflict control, unlike conventional warfare, strength must be pitted against strength. The objective, once again, is to freeze the tactical

situation as quickly as possible -- to stabilize the confrontation at the local level and thereby to provide an incentive for both sides to start talking instead of shooting. Unless the other side is more cooperative than we have any right to expect, this requirement is likely to produce relatively high initial attrition among committed units; such a condition can only be justified by the expectation that hostilities can be ended quickly.<sup>27</sup> Even so, the explicitly no-win character of the engagement enhances the importance of reliance on volunteer regular forces.

Just as maneuver will be restricted, so must the use of firepower. This requirement reflects neither humanitarian concerns nor any particular desire to avoid collateral damage (the latter, in fact, might be helpful to the extent it impeded hostile movement). Instead, the problem is to avoid transmitting unintentionally a signal implying we have either changed our objectives or despaired of achieving them without escalation. In the extreme tension of a superpower confrontation, such an error would be intolerable.<sup>28</sup> At a minimum, then, conflict control would require revision of current targeting procedures according to which hostile command-and-control elements are priority targets. It will be as important that the other side be able to control its units as for us to control our own. More important, the concept directly opposes the early employment of tactical nuclear weapons, and even argues for their physical removal from units assigned the control mission -- not because they might otherwise be used, but because the other

side might fear they would, and react accordingly.

Such restrictions, even more than that on maneuver, are likely to encounter bitter opposition from American officers long accustomed to the profligate use of firepower. More important, it will be objected that they would undermine the very threat of uncontrolled escalation which is the principal deterrent to aggression. If that were true it would be a cruel dilemma indeed, for the requirement to deter deliberate aggression must then be pitted directly against the desire to limit the costs of accidental conflict.

But in fact, conflict control would not preclude eventual escalation, nuclear or conventional. It would only delay it. Indeed, the likelihood of eventual escalation in the event control fails is increased by the very inability of a conflict control posture to contain a sustained attack. This inherent fragility serves notice on the other side that it operates at the margin of risk -- a margin defined by the length of time the control forces can maintain the local stalemate. That period exceeded, escalation is likely to be inevitable, as a consequence of US actions or allied actions or both.

In short, conflict control under the best of circumstances will be a difficult and risky business. This implies one final constraint -- perhaps the most incompatible with traditional military practice: direct political control of tactical operations must be expected. When an action having minor tactical significance can unintentionally convey a message having dispro-

portionate and perhaps disastrous strategic consequences, political leaders can be pardoned for insisting upon a degree of control commensurate with their ultimate liability. Tactical unit commanders at every echelon must accordingly be prepared to tolerate unprecedented restrictions on their local initiative, even at the cost of heavy casualties and reduced combat effectiveness. And precise execution of tactical assignments must be ranked with the demonstration of personal initiative as a measure of professional competence.

All these self-imposed limitations -- on objectives, means, and local discretion -- reflect the peculiarly political character of an inadvertent conflict. Conflict control thus poses a distinct challenge to the American professional soldier, and its adoption will therefore require substantial re-education. It will also place a premium on the identification and selection of field commanders who possess both the sophistication needed to understand the constraints upon them, and the leadership, emotional stamina, and professional skill to operate effectively within them.

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The doctrine proposed here has implications transcending the reconciliation of threat with capability. By halting the current trend toward precipitate force reductions, and by justifying forward deployment in areas of maximum danger, conflict control would reaffirm the commitment of the United States to the defense of its allies and to the continued development of a stable

international order. It would do so within the framework of the Nixon Doctrine, seeking not to resolve all sources of interstate conflict, but to insure that limited conflicts rooted in local tensions do not become great power confrontations risking global holocaust. It offers an incentive to other great powers to exercise a similar restraint on their own commitments, without claiming any universal right to judge their behavior or duty to regulate it.

Conflict control is an expressly reactive strategy. It recommends a force posture and tactical doctrine whose essential component is self-restraint. In Europe, it seeks to restructure the US commitment so that NATO doctrine and NATO capabilities are brought once more into alignment. At the same time, it justifies a configuration compatible with negotiated force reductions; in fact, by helping to reduce the nuclear/conventional asymmetry between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, it would enhance the prospect that MBFR will produce a true balance of capabilities at lower cost without forfeiting the interests of our NATO partners. In Asia, conflict control suggests a careful recalculation of US interests and an effort to reduce the ambiguity which presently beclouds the extent of the US commitment, particularly to Japan and Australia. It forswears any intent to impose a Pax Americana in the Third World; at the same time, it asserts unmistakably our commitment to similar non-interference by other great powers.

To the Congress, conflict control would offer a moderate and reasonable justification for maintaining an effective ground combat capability -- a



justification more persuasive than tired warnings of communist aggression, and more appropriate to the national interest than suggestions calling for active military involvement in domestic social problems. Congressional hostility to overseas commitments stems in large part from Congressional impatience with the inconsistent and frequently ill-founded arguments for maintaining them. Today, over-estimates of the military threat will only widen the credibility gap which characterizes the military-Congressional relationship, further reducing both the capacity of legislators to make reasoned policy judgments and that of the military to execute them.

Finally, by redirecting a limited war doctrine which has become associated with American intervention, conflict control is likely to find a receptive public audience. It has often been argued that Americans will never accept a military posture which fails to guarantee rapid and complete military success; some have interpreted public disenchantment with the Vietnam experience as evidence of that sort of propensity. But it is equally likely that public unhappiness with past US behavior reflects a deepening awareness of the limits of national power, and an increasing desire to insure that the nation's strength -- moral and material -- is not dissipated in commitments whose premises have become suspect, and whose importance to American security is obscure. The threat of inadvertent conflict is not contrived, nor does it assume an implacable East-West hostility belied by contemporary international events. Rather, it simply reflects the danger, in an armed and turbulent world, of the frailty of rational decision and the limits of govern-

### FOOTNOTES

1. I am grateful to Professor Warner Schilling, of the Columbia Institute of War and Peace Studies, and to Dr. Donald Brennan, of the Hudson Institute, for their kind assistance in unraveling the strategic complexities addressed in this paper. In addition, a number of people took time from busy schedules to read and comment upon earlier drafts: Colonels Lee Olvey and George Osborn, LTC William Taylor, Majors Richard Beal, James Ellis, Richard Gallagher, Howard Graves, Darryl Henderson, John Landry, and Stanley Russell, and Captains Lloyd Brown and Wesley Clark, all of the Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy; Dr. Jay Luvaas, of the Department of History, USMA; LTC Frederic Brown, of the Office of the Vice Chief of Staff, Department of the Army; and LTC Simon R. Sinnreich, US Army-Retired, formerly on the General Staff, US Army Europe.
2. Many would argue, in fact, that the burden shifted long ago, hence the development of a flexible response strategy. But at least as late as 1962, the US could claim that overwhelming nuclear superiority conferred a marginal advantage in a confrontation. In the wake of SALT I, clearly, even that arguable advantage has evaporated.
3. Some observers approve this ambiguity in view of the fluidity of the contemporary international environment. See, e.g., Robert J. Pranger, "Defense Implications of International Indeterminacy," Foreign Affairs Studies No. 4 (Washington, D. C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, May 1972), p. 12ff. Pranger's argument is convincing; but ambiguity ceases to be useful when it begins to cause confusion of purpose. That is precisely the nature of the current military problem.
4. See, e.g., Robert E. Osgood, "The Reappraisal of Limited War," Adelphi Paper No. 54, "Problems of Modern Strategy" (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, Feb 1969), pp. 41-54.
5. For a good short treatment of this background, see William F. Kaufman, The McNamara Strategy (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), Chapter 1.
6. Morton H. Halperin, Defense Strategies for the Seventies (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), pp. 103-104. Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith offer a different view in How Much Is Enough? (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 215. Enthoven and Smith argue that NATO doctrine never "worst-cased," but instead sought to justify an "intermediate level

mental control. Both are conditions with which the American people have become only too familiar.

A nation, it is said, gets the military establishment it deserves. The United States will not be well-served by an institution whose character and behavior are shaped by fragmentary adjustments having no relation to fundamental national objectives. The reconciliation of military planning with political purpose presents a difficult contemporary challenge, but one far too vital to defer any longer.

of conventional capability." Since planning assumed a three-month war, however, it is clear something more provocative than a border incident was anticipated.

7. This argument would obviously benefit from a considerably more elaborate analysis of Soviet and Chinese intentions than can be offered here. For a brief discussion supporting this estimate, see Halperin, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 54-71. For an opposed view, see Uri Ra'Anan, "The Changing American-Soviet Strategic Balance: Some Political Implications," Subcommittee on National Security and International Operations of the Committee on Government Operations, United States Senate (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1972), p. 13.
3. The concept of inadvertent war is not new among strategic analysts. Given perhaps its classic elaboration by Herman Kahn in Thinking About the Unthinkable (New York: Horizon Press, 1962), pp. 40-50, it has been at least addressed by numerous others, including Osgood, Halperin, and Kissinger. Doubtless these treatments influenced force posture decisions to some extent; nonetheless, the threat of deliberate attack appears to have dominated planning, presumably on the (arguable) grounds that any defense posture adequate to contain the latter would also suffice in the event of inadvertent conflict.
9. John Newhouse, "US Troops in Europe: Issues and Alternatives," The Atlantic Community Quarterly, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Winter 1971 1972), pp. 470-473. See also John H. Hoagland, "Changing Patterns of Insurgency and American Response," Journal of International Affairs, Vol. XXV, No. 1 (1971), p. 139.
10. Joseph Alsop, "Go Versus No-Go." The New York Times Sunday Magazine (March 11, 1973), p. 31ff.
11. It might be objected that to call the Korean and Cuban conflicts inadvertent stretches the meaning of the term, since in each case both the initiating act and the subsequent US intervention followed considered political decisions. The quality of inadvertence derives, however, not solely from the origins of the conflict, but from the initiator's misestimate of the consequences of his act. The North Korean invasion occurred only after the US had apparently excluded South Korea from its defense perimeter. The invasion thus represented, not a deliberate provocation of the US, but a miscalculation of US interests stemming largely from our own ambiguity. To the USSR, American intervention must have been as surprising as unsought. See, e.g., Morton H. Halperin, Limited War in the Nuclear Age (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1963), pp. 43-44; and Glen D. Paige, The Korean Decision (New York: The Free Press, 1968), pp. 65-69.

On the inadvertent quality of the Chinese intervention, see Allen S. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1960), pp. 151-162 and 166-172.

In the case of Cuba 1962, the US government cannot be charged with having been ambiguous; the USSR was several times warned unmistakably that the US would not tolerate a Soviet offensive capability in Cuba. Nevertheless it is quite possible that the USSR foresaw no immediate confrontation, hoping by secret installation of the missiles to present the US with a fait accompli at some later time, or at least to defer detection until the conclusion of the 1962 election reduced Kennedy's incentive to react. Once again, much evidence supports the view that the US announcement of discovery and quarantine came as a considerable shock to the Soviets. See, e.g., Graham T. Allison, Essence of Decision (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), pp. 50-56; and Elie Abel, The Missile Crisis (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 110.

In each case, in short, US intervention was neither sought nor anticipated, and when it nevertheless occurred, radically transformed the situation from one of local commitment involving limited risk to one of global confrontation risking nuclear war.

12. Henry A. Kissinger, American Foreign Policy (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1969), pp. 53-58.
13. Some disagree with this appraisal. Other explanations of Soviet Behavior at SALT could certainly be advanced; but most appear to attribute to Soviet decision-making a Machiavellian quality which the writer finds unpersuasive.
14. See, e.g., Hoagland, Op. Cit., pp. 134-135; Thomas W. Wolfe, "The Soviet Quest for More Globally Mobile Naval Power," Rand Memorandum RM-5554-RR (Dec 1967); and Norman Polmar, "Soviet Naval Power," Strategy Paper No. 13 (New York: National Strategy Information Center, Inc., 1972), pp. 33-43. Recent changes in Soviet military and political leadership may reinforce this argument. See The New York Times, April 23, 1973, p. 1, and April 28, 1973, p. 1.
15. This function should not be confused with the "interposition" function performed in the past by United Nations peacekeeping forces. Both, it is true, seek to halt a local conflict -- but on different terms and under vastly different conditions.

16. Used with apologies to Lincoln P. Bloomfield and Amelia C. Leiss, who employ the same term to designate a quite different enterprise. See their Controlling Small Wars (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969). Here the "litmus test" for US intervention is not superpower advantage, but direct superpower involvement.
17. This, despite much debate about relative NATO/Warsaw Pact conventional capabilities. See, e.g., Enthoven and Smith, Op. Cit., pp. 117-136. Enthoven and Smith argue that NATO can match the Pact conventionally, but only after a variable period of mobilization and reinforcement. In the short term, they admit, tactical setbacks must be expected. Unfortunately, a tactical setback for the US might mean the loss of Nuremburg to the West Germans -- whence the difficulty.  
For an extremely lucid critique of the "political warning" assumption, see LTC Warren A. Samouce, "Political Warning and Military Planning," Military Review, Vol. LIII, No. 4 (April 1973), pp. 17-24.
18. Some disagree, arguing that NATO forces could be configured in a clearly defensive posture. See, for example, Steven L. Canby, "The Wasteful Ways of NATO," Survival, Vol. XV, No. 1 (Jan/Feb 1973), pp. 21-22. This paper supports arguments for a defensive configuration; but there are upper limits on the size of this force nevertheless. Threat, after all, is a function of perception, and the Soviets are as likely to worst-case as we.
19. Ibid.
20. For a more elaborate analysis of this issue, see Thomas C. Schelling, Arms and Influence (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 221-227.
21. There is some logic to the argument that this function might best be served by Marine units supported by fast carrier task forces, both peculiarly suited by doctrine and capabilities for just such a mission.
22. Considerable work has already begun in some of these areas. For a concise description, see Trevor Cliffe, "Military Technology and the European Balance," Adelphi Paper No. 89 (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, August 1972), pp. 7-10.
23. On this point, see Henry T. Nash, "Information and Decision Making in Limited War," Military Review, Vol. L, No. 2 (Feb 1970), pp. 81-83.
24. A similar idea has been advanced by Lord Gladwyn in "The Defense of Western Europe," Foreign Affairs, Vol. 51, No. 3 (April 1973), pp. 588-597.

25. In fact, the British Army of the Rhine may be a good model for the sort of structure required by a conflict control doctrine.
26. Space does not permit much elaboration of these recommendations, nor detailed suggestion of the ways in which such a posture might be configured to insure smooth expansion in the event of a decision to mobilize for sustained conventional conflict. Several alternatives could be supposed, ranging from periodic rotation of units from forward deployment to home garrisons, to (more reasonably) maintenance of redundant command and staff elements for each major unit, whose function would be to provide the superstructure of an expanded force upon mobilization. The point is, such changes are neither impractical, nor necessarily incompatible with current institutional reforms.
27. If they cannot, and the inadvertent conflict becomes, tragically, a general war, the sacrifice will have been wasted; but in that event, it will represent only a small part of the total waste. The argument here reflects what Warner Schilling has called the 'principle of least harm': when in doubt, choose the course of action whose outcome will be least disastrous if the premises supporting it turn out to be wrong.
28. Some have even suggested an arrangement with the Soviet Union to deploy compatible field communications systems, and providing for regularized tactical-level communications links in case of crisis. The notion may appear slightly heretical from a military point of view, but its logic is still persuasive.